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ABSTRACT

Bringing structure to the reading assessment process, this paper presents a draft proposal of an assessment structure which practitioners can follow, one which can be applied systematically within the Instructional Support Team process across Pennsylvania. After some background information, the paper briefly discusses features of effective reading assessment, suggesting that effective reading assessment needs to be continuous, multidimensional, authentic, student centered, and performance based. The paper then presents an evaluation form for reading assessment domains. It next discusses 14 points to remember or clarify in developing the instrumentation. The paper then outlines the 3 steps of the proposed instrumentation (entry, selecting materials, and sampling). A description of how to compile running records of students' reading processes is attached. (RS)

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DRAFT PROPOSAL

READING ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTATION

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A Systematic Search for What Works!

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READING ASSESSMENT INSTRUMENTATION

Background

Our Charge

Historically, when a child was found struggling in school the general inference was made and the question asked, "What was wrong with the child?" Special and remedial programs were created to determine and supposedly fix the child's problem. Seldom was the question asked, "What was wrong with the learning environment to cause or contribute to the child's struggle?" This question is now being addressed systematically through the Instructional Support Team (IST) process. Educators are seeking answers to this question and searching for what works in order to create opportunities within the classroom environment for each child to be successful.

As IST becomes a more integral part of the school structure, it is essential to institutionalize those attributes which foster its high implementation. What exactly does this mean? While Chapter 342 focuses on providing assistance to each identified child, full implementation assumes a broader connotation. Within the IST framework, the question becomes one of "How does the school work for every child?" Full implementation is achieved when the IST process: (1) is seen as a vehicle for helping staff determine, coordinate, and facilitate what works for each individual child; (2) is used as a vehicle for facilitating staff participation in teacher development, teacher empowerment and collaboration, shared training and guided practice; (3) allows for the meaningful and flexible coordination of services so that barriers do not exist; and (4) provides valid data demonstrating the positive effects of IST on student learning and behavior on both an individual and school wide basis.

A large part of the success of the IST process will be determined by what actually occurs within the context of reading instruction. The challenge facing our IST/KSRA Task Force is to align our thinking and to bring structure to the reading assessment process. More specifically, we need to decide upon an assessment structure which practitioners can follow, one which can be applied systematically within the IST process across the state. The structure needs to facilitate uniformity in training, assure consistency in administration, instill greater accountability, and allow for reasonable flexibility. What we agree upon as an effective reading assessment instrumentation will be critical since its use will become part of the larger structure of how schools throughout Pennsylvania conduct business both within and beyond the IST process.

Features of Effective Reading Assessment

Effective reading assessment should be grounded in what actually occurs during classroom instruction. Of necessity, it needs to be:

Continuous Instructional assessment represents a dynamic and on-going process of providing formative and summative data to guide decisions about curriculum and instruction and to measure the outcomes of performance.

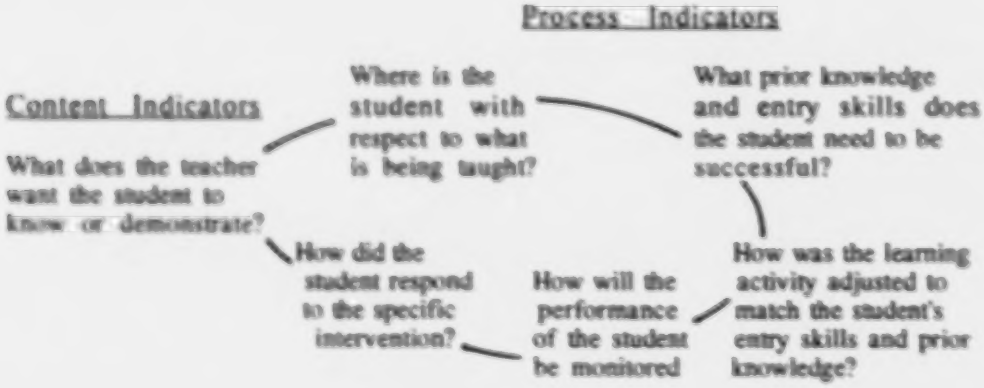
Multidimensional The continuous and interrelated nature of assessment and instruction necessitate the need for multiple and repeated samplings of behavior in response to ever changing learning situations.

Authentic. Instructional assessment must be thoroughly grounded in real life situations. It must occur in natural settings using meaningful materials for genuine purposes.

Student Centered Assessment and instruction reflect the interrelated and continuous process of teaching the child. The process is centered on the child and is not limited to a particular strategy. A strategy is a method or technique used in the process of teaching the child. A strategy is only one aspect of the process and not the entire process.

Performance Based For the assessment process to be effective, teachers and students need to know what the classroom expectations and learning standards are for the instructional activity. They need to know of the required performance and have a clear understanding of the final product.

These features should be imbedded into the instrumentation we agree upon and should allow for the following IST questions to be addressed.


Process Indicators
Content Indicators
What does the teacher want the student to know or demonstrate?
Where is the student with respect to what is being taught?
What prior knowledge and entry skills does the student need to be successful?
How was the learning activity adjusted to match the student's entry skills and prior knowledge?
How will the performance of the student be monitored
How did the student respond to the specific intervention?

Reading Assessment Domains

Name_____ Grade____ Text_____ Date_____

Essential Domains & Options	Procedures	Summary of Findings & Recommendations
Language Base Does the student have the concepts & background knowledge for the task?	Book Introduction Concepts of Print Before, During & After Reading	
Word Recognition Does the student have the sight word pool to read the selection?	Knowns/Unknowns Accuracy Percent Error Rate Self-Corrections	
Word Study (Analysis) Does the student use a system for figuring out unknown words?	Meaning Cues Visual Cues Structure Cues	
Oral Fluency Does the student read with adequate phrasing and expression?	Time Samplings Tape Recordings Fluency Rubrics	
Silent Fluency Does the student read with adequate speed silently?	Time Samplings Dialogues Tape Recordings Fluency Rubrics	
Comprehending Can the student remember and tell about what he or she read?	Retellings Unaided & Aided	
Metacognition Does the student demonstrate strategic reading?	Think Alouds Process Interviews Self-Questioning	

Points to Remember or Clarify in Developing the Instrumentation

1. Support team members need a reading assessment structure which they can consistently follow and one which they can implement without too much difficulty. It has been our experience that the best IST results occur when team members consistently follow a recommended structure.

2. The reading assessment process must provide an accurate baseline as well as an on-going data base to measure changes in the student's reading performance. The process must generate the types of quantitative data which provide for measurable demonstrations of change to insure accountability.

3. The initial stage of the IST process necessitates greater observation to determine the developmental appropriateness of reading instruction. It is not enough to determine where the child is functioning, the process must also determine how the learning environment impacts upon the child.

4. Instructional assessment requires continuous sampling. Learning and teaching are dynamic processes which of necessity require continuous sampling. Instructional assessment does not occurs in a vacuum. The process is connected to the on-going instruction of the classroom.

5. The dynamic and multidimensional nature of instruction requires that the reading assessment instrumentation we agree upon will maintain some degree of flexibility. In the words of Valencia, McGinley, and Pearson (1990):

> "Those who accept the responsibility of being 'assessors' must be knowledgeable about the content and processes they are assessing...At times, we enter into the assessment situation with prespecified criteria and tasks in mind. At other times we are simply knowledgeable observers of students in their natural learning environment, we look for patterns that will enlighten our understanding and add to our assessment portfolio. And at other times, we interact with students, prompting them, guiding them, questioning them, and listening to them with the skills of a knowledgeable educator". (p. 4).

6. The instructional level is a learning and teaching zone where optimal conditions for learning occur. Working at one's instructional level does not mean reading at a particular grade level in a particular book. The instructional level concept is a mental perception of "fit" where the student feel comfortable knowing that he or she will be successful performing the activity.

7. In agreeing upon an assessment instrumentation which supports good instruction, we must be very careful not to repeat a common "flaw" of normative/standardized testing. The flaw which we are referring to is the practice of abandoning the student at a frustrational level. This is a poor assessment practice and does not support good instruction. By acknowledging this flaw, we are not advocating for the removal of normative/standardize testing which has value for summative testing purposes. Summative testing, however, is of questionable value in guiding classroom instruction.

8. There are times in the reading assessment process when in the assessor's view it is appropriate to sample the student's reading performance using new and unfamiliar material. There are other times in the assessor's view when it is appropriate to sample the student's reading performance using familiar material. But under most circumstances, the assessor may feel that it is appropriate to do both. The decision depend upon the professional judgment of the assessor, the assessment goal, and the comfort level of the student.

9. There are also times during the reading process when it is appropriate to read to the student to assess the student's listening comprehension. There are other times when comprehension is assessed after the student has read aloud. There are other times where comprehension is assessed after the student has completed silent reading. The decisions as to which type of situation is called for depends again upon the professional judgment of the assessor, the assessment goal, and the comfort level of the student.

10. Retelling is the agreed upon strategy for measuring comprehension within our instrumentation. This strategy provides great flexibility. It can be used repeatedly for assessing listening, oral reading, and silent reading. It also lends itself to the use of unaided and aided questioning as a means of assessing the student's ability to interact with content and can be easily adapted to the use of a rubric for systematic data collection.

11. The sampling of written work is a natural extension of reading as well as a natural vehicle for expressing comprehension. For example, writing can occur before reading as a predictive activity, during reading as note taking activity, and after reading as a summative activity. It can also be used as an independent activity as in journal writing. Those involved in the IST process should encourage the sampling of written work and of linking writing to other forms of communication.

12. While there was no clear support among our group for assessing fluency, we did acknowledge that it serves as a motivational tool for students and

a communication vehicle for expressing to teachers that there are useful strategies for developing fluency and automaticity. We felt that fluency, however, should not be the primary thrust of our instrumentation and measurement efforts. We agreed that we should remain flexible allowing teachers the choice of using time sampling, tape recording or rubrics as measures of fluent and flexible reading. We acknowledged that fluency does become an important issue when students are disfluent and when how they read calls attention to them rather than to what they read.

13. With a large and diverse number of reading strategies, support teachers, reading specialists, classroom teachers and other team members could profit from clarifying which strategies are more conducive for assessment, which are more conducive for instruction, which do both, and which tend to build off one another.

14. It is a common practice among reading specialists, for example, to administer Informal Reading Inventories (IRIs) to students. If school personnel feel that this practice gives them additional information, helps them to substantiate the approximate reading difficulty of materials which are appropriate for students, and provides them with other useful information, we see no reason for them not to use IRI procedures as part of their assessment portfolios.

Propcsed Instrumentation

Entry (Step 1)

During the entry phase, the first step of the reading assessment process involves forming general impressions about the learning environment in which the student is asked to function. Observations of the classroom environment and interviews with the teacher and with the student take place at this time.

Classroom Observation

(While we do not recommend the use of any specific observation, teacher interview, or student interview technique, method, or instrumentation; examples have been provided illustrating the types of questions and methods which seem appropriate. This is often a matter of experience and personal preference).

Teacher Interviews

Student Interviews

Hypothesis Forming (Step 2)

Selecting Material

Before the reading specialist or the support teacher can begin the process of assessing the student's reading performance, he or she must have access to available reading materials.

The selection process starts with selecting reading material currently in use in the classroom. An array of other reading material should also be made available to choose from when collecting data. This material may consist of literature based texts, trade books, or readers from a particular basal reading series. If the IST referral happens to be due to a content area problem such as science or social studies, the content material can still be used for assessment purposes. The materials should contain both familiar and unfamiliar passages, and when appropriate, student self-selected passages. In this latter case, the student may choose a trade book or browse through a selection to find a story or passage of his or her liking.

The luxury of reading assessment and instruction is that there are hosts of materials to choose from which can be arranged according to their levels of difficulty. This process enables the teacher to select material which closely match the student's instructional level. If the student has been observed in the classroom prior to assessment, it will be easier to select appropriate reading material.

Regardless of the preferred procedure, professional judgment is required in selecting the reading material to be used with the student in the assessment process. This judgment is guided by the assessment goal and tempered by the knowledge gained during the observation and interview process. If the assessor wants to know how the student processes printed information and comprehends what is read, for example, the selection of material cannot be too challenging or it will destroy comprehension. If the assessor already knows that the grade level material is too difficult for the student to read on his or her own, but wants to determine whether or not the student can understand the material when it is read to them, then the assessor would want to use the actual material used in the classroom.

There are also mediating strategies which can be used to segment materials that are too difficult for the student to read which provide substantial information without having to frustrate the student by having the student attempt to read the material. This is an example of why the assessor needs to be knowledgeable about the content and strategies they are using when assessing.

Actual Copy of the Selection to be Read by the Student

Hypothesis Forming

Sampling (Step 3)

In sampling a student's actual reading performance, it is helpful to distinguish between beginning the assessment process and continuing the process as part of on-going instruction. In sampling the student's performance for the first time, it is important not to repeat a common flaw of normative/standardized testing, which is the practice of exiting the student at a frustrational level. You do not want to perpetuate frustrational reading conditions, especially for students whose reading problems have become more entrenched as they have grown older. In beginning the assessment process, you are merely trying to gain a sense of the student's entry knowledge and skill levels and to use this information to begin developing reading activities on the student's instructional level.

Conversely, you do not want to stop the assessment process prematurely at the first sign of frustration. If frustration starts to occur, you may want to choose to go in a different direction, which is why we recommend that you have an array of reading materials to choose from and why we engage students in prereading activities. Remember, an instructional level is a comfort zone. One of the things you are attempting to do during this initial period is to find, and when necessary, to create this zone, which is why you work back and forth in different materials.

It is important to set the stage for favorable learning and teaching conditions to occur during this beginning process. For this reason we prefer to explain to the students that: "They will not be taking a test. They are to do their best and not to worry about making mistakes! What we will be looking for is what they know and how they try to find out what it is they don't know." As with instruction, the assessment process is guided by three basis rules:

1. Always look for what is known.
2. Never look just for the unknown.
3. Always build in success.

Flexibility should be exercised in determining how to proceed with the initial reading assessment process. Obviously, the student needs to feel comfortable with you and you need to have a sense of where to start with the student. Since the IST process serves students across the entire elementary spectrum, it is generally advisable to engage the student in a prereading activity before deciding whether or not to have the student read a passage independently.

The word search procedure has been a valuable prereading assessment strategy in helping you to make this determination and is used to gain a measure of the student's print processing skills. It is conducted by selectively pointing to words

which the student has a high probability of knowing. With every fourth or fifth word, a more difficult word is selected. By keeping a lively pace, the word search should take no more than two or three minutes while covering 20-30 words. The process of searching for known and unknown words, discussing meaning, and folding-in difficult with easy words gives the practitioner a measure of the student's working sight vocabulary without frustrating the student. If five or fewer errors occur, the student may be asked to read the passage since the student's language and sight vocabulary should not hinder comprehension.

Depending upon the student and the situation, there are times where the process can begin with the teacher assuming the role of a neutral observer for the purpose of taking a "Running Record". This assessment practice provides you with a picture of how the student engages passage reading material independent of the teacher's help. As the name implies, this is a process which should be continued in order to provide you with a mechanism for data collection and fine tuning of the intervention. (Use of the "Running Record" should be firmly in place after the third or fourth session).

Data collected from this beginning reading assessment period is brought to the Instructional Support Team meeting at which time attention is paid to how the student's reading behaviors were orchestrated across the seven essential reading components. The information is used to determine the student's reading needs and in planning appropriate intervention strategies. Time restrictions may not have permitted an opportunity to begin the teaching process prior to the team meeting. In this case the actual teaching begins during the verification stage.

COMPREHENSION
STRATEGIES
Running
Records

Description: Running records are a way to observe, record and analyze what a child does in the reading process.

Skill Development:

Assessment
Comprehension
Fix up Strategies
Monitoring Comprehension
Oral Reading
Self Appraisal
Self Monitoring
Story Grammar
Word Attack
Word Recognition

Target Reading Levels:

Primary and Intermediate
_X_ Individual __Small Group __Whole Group

Text/Materials:

Basal/Self-selected text.
Expository/Narrative text.
Trade Books

REASONS FOR DOING A RUNNING RECORD

1. Provides an accurate and objective description of what actually occurs in the course of reading.

2. Provides diagnostic information on how the reader is processing print.

3. Indicated what a reader knows/can do.

4. Provides insights about what needs to be learned next.

5. Provides qualitative as well as quantitative information.

6. Provides a picture of progress over time.

7. Allows the teacher to make informed decisions concerning:
   - instructional needs
   - grouping
   - reading levels
   - suitable materials

8. Allows the teacher to monitor effectiveness of program emphasis/mini lessons.

9. Provides documented information for other teachers, administrators, parents, etc.

Materials compiled by Bonnie Karlip
Reading Recovery Teacher

PROCEDURES

Running records of text reading were developed by New Zealand educator Marie Clay as a way to observe, record and analyze what a child does in the process of reading. The teacher assumes the role of a neutral observer for the purpose of taking a record of the child's independent reading.

The child reads orally from a familiar or unfamiliar text (basal, literature based, trade book, self-selected).

Reading generally proceeds on an independent basis, however, the teacher may supply a word if the child is stopped.

Teacher records the reading using a kind of short hand miscue recording technique.

While the child is reading, the teacher watches for and records behaviors such as: substitutions, repetitions, self-corrections, omissions, long pauses, insertions, appeals for help, or words told in order to proceed. (Also overflow behaviors such as wiggling in seat or coughing.)

After reading, the teacher analyzes the record, making inferences as to the child's use of cues and hypothesizing about a child's use of strategies.

This analysis helps the teacher make instructional decisions about future text or about how to direct teacher/child attention during class.

Running records can be taken on any page of any book.

Generally, a 100 to 200 word sample is adequate.

A familiar text can be used. It may indicate whether the material the child has been using is appropriate and whether or not the child makes use of strategies taught. An unfamiliar text can be used. It may indicate whether the child is able to integrate strategies independently as well as willingness to take risks.

Known and Unknown Words

A. Introduce next text carefully. Use, incidentally, vocabulary from the text in the introduction.

B. Have children locate known words.

C. Provide the child with the beginning letter sound.

D. Tell the child to make the beginning letter sound of the unknown word.

E. Tell the child to search through the word for clues, e.g.
"sing" "ing" in "single"
"play" "ing" in "playing"
(encourage the child to run his/her finger under the word to assist the search).

Self Monitoring

A. Ask the child questions like...

Does that make sense?	What did you notice?
Does that sound right?	How did you know?
Does that look right?	Why did you stop?

B. Have the child try the sentence or passage again.

C. Have the child look at the illustration.

Adapted from M. Early, New Zealand Ministry of Education, 1992

Searching for cues:

MEANING (M)

You said...Does that make sense?
Try that again and think what would make sense.

STRUCTURE (S)

You said...Does that sound right?
Try that again and think what would sound right.

VISUAL (V)

You said....Does that look right?
If it was...., what letter would you expect to see
at the beginning?
What could you try?
Do you know a word like that?
What do you think it could be?
Do you know a word that starts with those letters?
Do you know a word that ends with those letters?
What do you know that might help?